System Improvement is needed to aid in focusing this growth in a manner consistent with local plans and to meet the transportation need for improved local and regional mobility.

1.2.3 Improve Regional Mobility

Improve Regional Mobility addresses a need for a Transportation System Improvement to enhance mobility for trips originating within the Project Corridor and traveling to points elsewhere within the region, as well as for trips passing through the Project Corridor.

Regional mobility is constrained by the lack of a direct north–south route linking I-55 with I-80 that is of adequate capacity and design speed to efficiently move regional travel (Exhibit 1-8). The existing interstate system servicing the Project Corridor is deficient in north-south travel routes because the highway network within the region evolved as a radial system designed to move people and goods to and from the Chicago central area, the historic center of regional commerce. This radial system exists today and includes multi-modal transportation corridors including highways, CTA rail service, commuter rail and bus. This system provides good access to the Chicago central area. However, north-south suburban travel does not share the same level of service. This is due in part because the transportation network has not maintained pace with regional growth and has not adjusted to accommodate changing development and travel patterns.

As illustrated in Exhibit 1-3, Job/ Household Balance, the region's primary job center dispersed between 1970 and 1995 from the Chicago central area to O'Hare Airport and its nearby suburbs. Concurrently, population growth boomed in suburban areas outside the Chicago urban core. The migration of jobs and population from the Chicago urban core to the suburbs has increased demand for north-south, suburban-to-suburban travel. This demand is in addition to the historic and continuing demand for radial travel to and from the Chicago

central area. Actions have been taken and are underway to address growing north-south travel demand including completing the I-294 beltway in 1960 and partially completing I-290/I-355 beltway in 1989. I-294 is a complete beltway that provides circumferential travel at a radial distance of 24 kilometers (15 miles) from the Chicago central area. I-290/I-355 is a partial beltway that provides for circumferential travel at a radius of 38 kilometers (24 miles) from downtown (Exhibit 1-9). I-290/I-355 terminates at the northern boundary of the Project Corridor. These beltways address travel demand primarily in the north-south direction and through trips seeking to bypass congestion in the Chicago central area.

A Transportation System Improvement is needed to connect I-80 to the I-290/I-355 beltway to improve mobility for regional travel originating outside the Project Corridor. Additionally, a Transportation System Improvement is needed to improve access to the interstate system from within the Project Corridor, thus improving mobility for regional trips originating within the Project Corridor. In the absence of a Transportation System Improvement, year 2020 No-Action regional travel times are projected to increase substantially.

Exhibit 1-10 presents the percent increase in peak (7-9 am) travel times between 1996 and 2020 for three points of origin that surround the Project Corridor. Two of the three origin points represent existing interchanges within the Study Area at I-55/I-294 and I-55/I-80. These locations represent route decision points for regional travel. The third origin point represents the location where I-80 enters the Study Area. This point was selected because no interchanges exist between I-80 and another interstate within the Study Area. However, I-80 at this location is primarily used for regional travel (CATS, 1998).

As evident in Exhibit 1-10, CATS projects a significant increase in regional travel times between 1990 and 2020 for the No-Action land use scenario. Table 1-1 summarizes the geographic extent areas of increased travel time occurring by year 2020 under the No-Action scenario.

Increased regional travel times, particularly at the I-55/I-80 interchange and where I-80 enters the Project Corridor are due in large part to the lack of a direct route connecting I-80 and I-55 within the Project Corridor. A Transportation System Improvement is needed to